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The President's Daily Brief

6 March 1969

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~~*Top Secret*~~ 50X1

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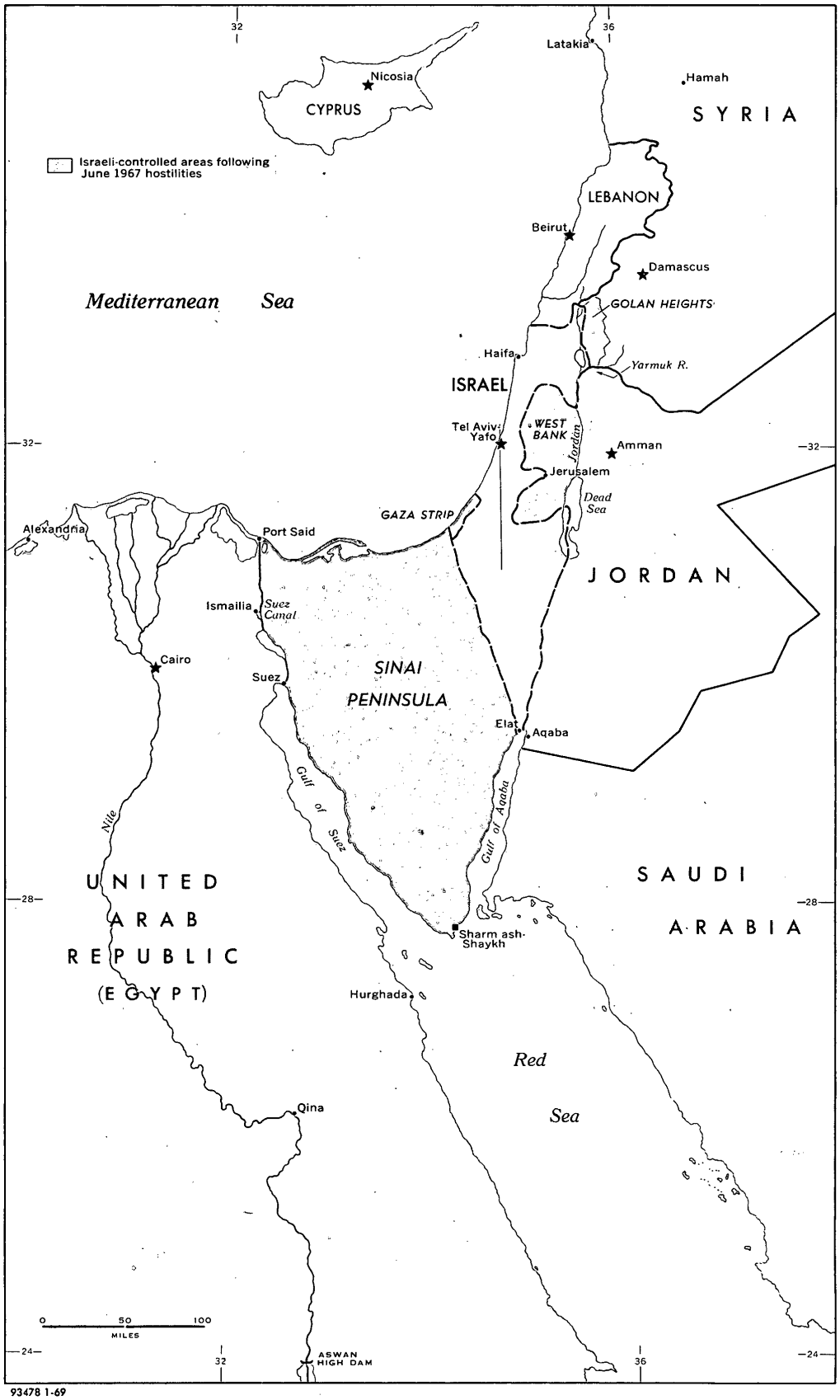

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LATE NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF OF 6 MARCH 1969

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7 March 1969

LATE NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF OF 6 MARCH 1969

I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

MIDDLE EAST

There is nothing significant to report.

EUROPE

There is nothing significant to report.

SOVIET AFFAIRS

The major Soviet newspapers carried a TASS item on Thursday summarizing President Nixon's press conference of 4 March. The article quotes the President on "new confidence and faith" between the US and its European allies, appending the President's disclaimer about expecting major results from exchanges of diplomatic niceties at the highest level. President Nixon's stress on US support for NATO was also brought out.

On US-Soviet relations, TASS paraphrases the President's statement that possibilities exist for bilateral negotiations limiting strategic weapons as well as on other problems. The article also notes the President's comment that the European trip was in preparation for an East-West summit meeting.

Embassy Moscow comments that while Soviet coverage of the press conference is highly selective, treatment of those portions presented is factual, continuing the neutral trend of Soviet reporting of the President's foreign policy pronouncements. Moscow is undoubtedly pleased

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to be able to show that, although the President reaffirmed US support for NATO, another reason for his trip was to prepare the groundwork for a top-level meeting with the Soviets.. [redacted] 50X1

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The Helmstedt-Berlin autobahn has been open since 1200 EST yesterday. [redacted] 50X1

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VIETNAM

[redacted]

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Reports overnight say that enemy military action continues at a relatively low level. [redacted] 50X1

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

There is nothing significant to report.

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

MIDDLE EAST

We understand that the student body at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem has a very high percentage of army veterans. This is yet another reason why the government will feel obliged to take some kind of retaliatory action for today's bombing in the university cafeteria. Israeli tempers are also getting short once again because of persistent Egyptian sniping along the Suez Canal. For a variety of reasons--including Eban's visit to the US--the Israeli Government, however, may find it politic to postpone any retaliatory measures a bit longer.

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EUROPE

The French trade union representatives walked out of the talks with management today. The fear of a period of labor unrest will distress already worried French speculators, and more pressure on the franc is certain to result.

Gold prices had already risen to record levels in London and Paris because of fears that the talks would produce inflationary settlement. The London closing price today was $43.25 an ounce; in Paris, gold reached $47.74 an ounce. Despite the existence of extensive exchange controls, money has been finding its way out of France, with one report stating that as much as 75 percent of the demand for gold in London comes from France.

Before the walkout, labor leaders had already called a general strike for next Tuesday. They learned the lesson of too much caution last May and are consulting with the rank and file about the extent and duration of the strike. Some wildcat walkouts have already begun.

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Our embassy in Bonn feels that the election yesterday of Gustav Heinemann as West Germany's next president will have a beneficial effect on its relations and reputation abroad. Heinemann's anti-Nazi reputation and his election over the opposition of the rightist National Democratic

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Party are plusses. The victory actually is a gain in prestige for the entire SPD and should mean votes in the Bundestag elections in September. Finally, Heinemann was supported throughout the three ballots by the bulk of the Free Democratic Party electors, which makes a coalition between the SPD and FDP following the fall election more of a possibility.

SOVIET AFFAIRS

The excitement in Berlin is probably about over. The military "exercises" that served as a pretext for autobahn closures seem to be coming to an end. Some Soviet units which have operated along and across the autobahns west of Berlin since the first of the week are returning to their garrisons. Their movements were used again today to justify intermittent autobahn closures. 50X1

Soviet air activity was also considerably reduced. 50X1

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In their propaganda output this morning, neither the East Germans nor the Soviets hinted at any further countermeasures in the Berlin area.

In a post-mortem on the activities of the last week, our mission in Berlin concluded that the East Germans obviously favored taking stronger action but that Moscow apparently decided its interest in talks with the US took precedence over pleasing Ulbricht.

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VIETNAM

The Communists' speeches in Paris today continued the theme that their military action in South Vietnam is a response to allied military pressure and justified on the basis of "self-defense." The Communists do not say so explicitly, but they obviously are trying to leave an impression [redacted] that they are ready to bargain on the issue of mutual de-escalation. The Front's Madame Binh is quoted by the Western press as saying that the Front has sought to "de-escalate" the war but that the US was only intensifying it. This may be a distorted version of her remarks, but the idea is implicit in many other recent Communist statements.

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Whether this talk of de-escalation becomes a full-blown campaign depends in part on how the US moves next and, more importantly, on what results the Communists can produce through their military offensive over the next several weeks. The current drive could culminate in a "peace campaign" emphasizing political action against the Saigon government and diplomatic pressure on the US to curb allied military operations.

The Communists will probably stop short of calling for a cease-fire, but they may well become bolder in suggesting a readiness to scale down their military activity in return for similar action by the US.

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Communist mortar crews in the southern half of the Demilitarized Zone lightly shelled South Vietnamese positions

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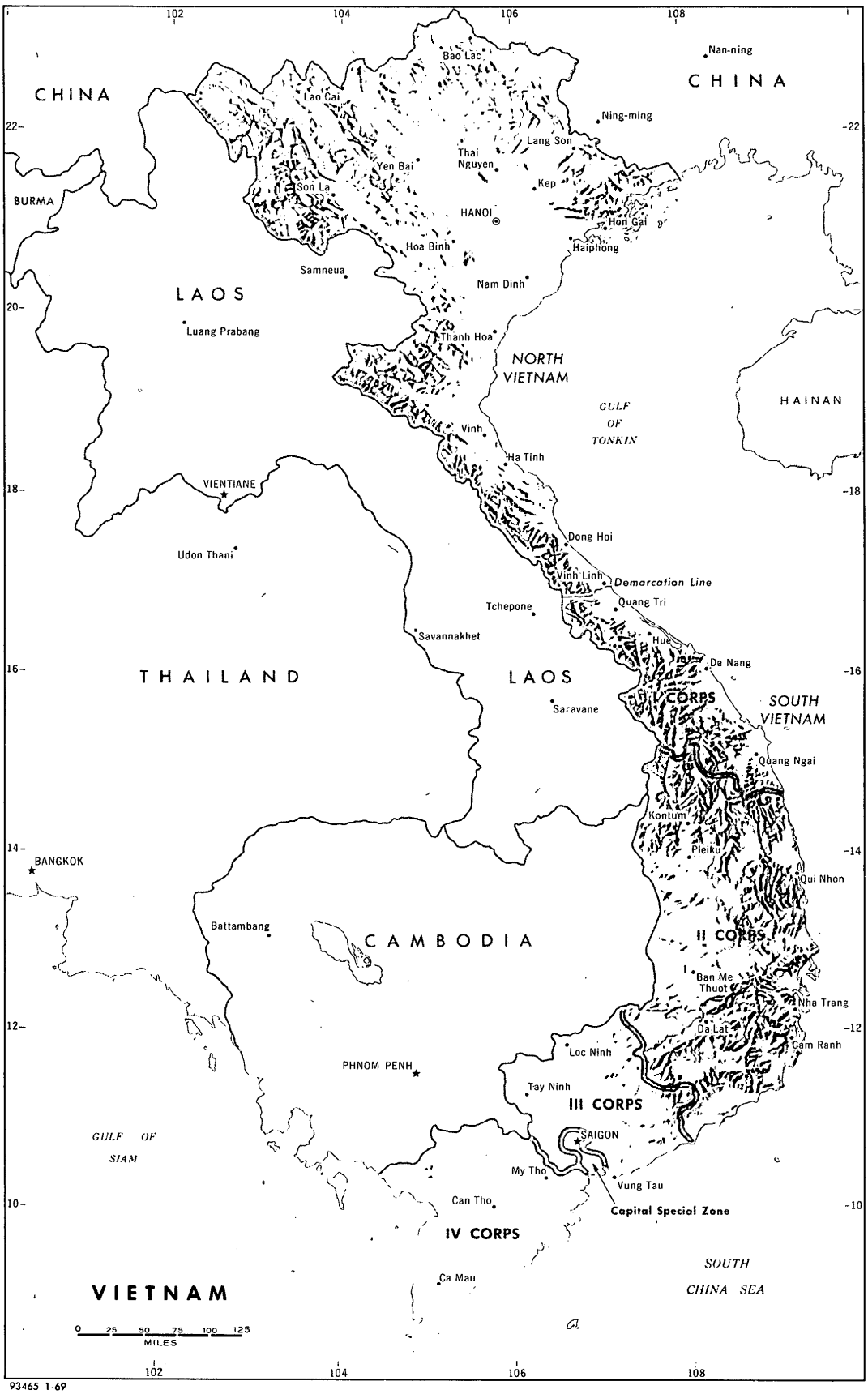

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in northeastern Quang Tri Province for the fifth straight day on 5 March. No allied casualties were reported. In the area just below the central DMZ, captured enemy documents tend to confirm that elements of the 246th NVA Regiment are operating south of the zone. It is not clear when or how the 246th returned to South Vietnam after pulling back into North Vietnam last summer, although we presume it crossed over the DMZ. The documents show that the 246th took part in the heavy attacks on two US Marine bases in north-central Quang Tri Province on 25 February. Other North Vietnamese units noted south of the DMZ recently are the 27th and 138th regiments.

With the exception of the early morning rocket attack on Saigon, enemy initiated activity on 6 March continued at the same reduced level as the past few days.

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II. OTHER MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

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CAMBODIA

Sihanouk made his first public references today to President Nixon's letter and the possibility of a rapprochement with the US. Although he did not go into details on the recent exchange at his press conference in Phnom Penh, it is clear from his remarks that Sihanouk has not yet received the President's follow-up to the letter. He offered, however, to release four recently captured US military officers if asked to do so by the President.

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Otherwise the tone of Sihanouk's remarks were clearly defensive and suspicious. He once again accused the US of mounting daily attacks across the Cambodian border. In doing so, Sihanouk made his most explicit public admission that North Vietnamese units are based in northeast Cambodia. He denied, however, as he has in the past, that the Duck Bill region in the southeast and other areas, which he said were regularly bombed by US planes, were sanctuaries of the Viet Cong.

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